The "Alien Origins" of the French Revolution: American, Scottish, Genevan, and Dutch Influences

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Historians have ascribed many origins *and* causes to the French Revolution, but they do not always clarify the distinction between the two categories. "Origins" and "causes" often appear synonymous, but in fact the first is temporal and the latter causal. "Origins" answer the question when; "causes" tell why. Causes explain an origin, but an origin explains nothing. Moreover, there is always an origin of an origin – so long as you don't invoke an Almighty God.[1] Furthermore, historians' motivations are not always heuristic but strategic, as Jack Goldstone recently admitted.[2] Finally, both origins and causes are as numerous as the elements of human society: they are economic, social, political, religious or cultural, intellectual or ideological, etc.[3] Hence a study of either origins or causes must investigate all

[*]Let me thank Carol Harrison for her corrections and fine support. Without her, this text would never have been published.

[1] Derrida would say that there are no origins at all, only supplements. Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 99.

[2] Jack A. Goldstone, "Predicting Revolutions: Why We Could (and Should) Have Foreseen the Revolutions of 1989-1991 in the U. S. S. R. and Eastern Europe," in *Debating Revolutions*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 78. Goldstone himself boasts that he can predict a revolution. Nikki Keddie expresses her doubts about this claim, because many revolutions have crucial causes that cannot be distilled from past experiences (74).

[3] It is true that many historians speak of origins, meaning causes. I choose the concept of cause, after mentioning my reservations about bundling two different concepts together. The most recent book on the topic is Peter Campbell, ed., *The Origins of the French Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

these fields and compare their reciprocal impacts. It cannot be satisfied with the investigation of only one or two of them.

Among the political and ideological causes of the French Revolution, one might consider its foreign roots, a subject about which little, if anything, has been written. Some scholars have focused on international wars or on international relations but usually in order to highlight the influence of international affairs on a single nation. Accordingly, the influence of the English ambassador in the Netherlands interested Alfred Cobban, while Bailey Stone and Tim Blanning tried to understand the effect of war on the French Revolution.[4] Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot stressed the international – or Atlantic – dimension of eighteenth-century uprisings, but they were more interested in the process of diffusion than of interaction, and they highlighted resemblances at the expense of divergences. In Godechot's *Grande Nation*, influence necessarily ran in one direction, beginning in France to be received elsewhere.[5]

As far I know, however, no historian has emphasized the intense interactions among international patriots in the years before 1789 or researched their impact on the French Revolution. Yet between 1776 and 1787 the web of exchanges among Europeans and Americans became increasingly dense because of the first revolts in America, Poland, Switzerland, the United Provinces, and the Austrian Netherlands. Franco Venturi's work is clear on this point, even if his bibliography is rather selective.[6]

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[4] Alfred Cobban, *Ambassadors and Secret Agents: The Diplomacy of the first Earl of Malmesbury at The Hague* (London: Cape, 1954); T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (New York: Longman, 1986); and Bailey Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution. A Global-Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[5] R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America*, *1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-1963); and Jacques Godechot, *La Grande Nation. L'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde*, 2 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1956).

[6] Venturi focuses on Italian newspapers and texts: Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe 1776-1789*, vol. 1, *The Great States of the West*, and vol. 2, *Republican Patriotism and the Empires of the East*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Obviously, these contacts and exchanges were not new: since the Renaissance, Europeans traveled across the continent, the Channel, or the Atlantic and knew more about their neighbors than we may think from our vantage point in an era of globalization. The eighteenth century was the age of the Grand Tour and the beginning of modern anthropology. Travel and travelogues were both fashionable, and readers had access to accounts of governments, arts, manners, and customs which they might be tempted to compare with the situation in their own countries.[7] Not all exchanges were peaceful: in the many wars at the end of the Old Regime, Europeans confronted one another in a completely different way. Then there was the press: the circulation of books, magazines, papers, or pamphlets. Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, for instance, had imitators in almost all the continental countries, and this success is another proof of the intensive relations within the Western world.

These contacts, which increased after the American War of Independence, could be interpreted as causes of the French Revolution. Although they did not directly give rise to the Revolution, we might understand them as second or third rank issues or as indirect challenges to the Old Regime. An anthropologist would describe them as an example of crisscross diffusion.[8] Among the most important of these contacts were thus books and newspapers and the interpretations and ideas they inspired; travels and foreign experiences, especially interactions between travelers and their hosts; and wars and conflicts and the

[7] For instance, on French visitors to the Netherlands, see Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau, *Le Voyage de Hollande: récits de voyageurs français dans les Provinces-Unies, 1748-1795* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994). See also Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (Dover, NH: Croom Helm 1985).

[8] J. M. Blaut, "Diffusionism: A Uniformitarian Critique," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77:1 (1987): 30-47. By crisscross diffusion, Blaut means that different communities are simultaneously inventing, transmitting, and receiving novel ideas, which crisscross the communication space.

changing perceptions they provoked. In this short essay, I will present a few examples of each.

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As Jonathan Israel has demonstrated, the Enlightenment entailed not only a large-scale production of books but also an intensive exchange of ideas across European national boundaries.[9] Among the important vectors of these ideas, the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century are perhaps more interesting than their French counterparts, because they wrote in a context of acute crisis and tried to find solutions to concrete problems. Inspired by Montesquieu, these Scottish thinkers in turn repeatedly inspired both the French and the Americans.[10] Rousseau's visit to Hume in England is further evidence of the Scots' reputation in the eighteenth century. Despite his dispute with Rousseau, Hume remained a good friend of the encyclopedists. From their Scottish colleagues, the French *philosophes* learned a way of thinking about the modern world and of accepting commerce, individualism, and political economy – as long as they inspired good manners and generated public wealth. D'Holbach and Diderot were the first to agree with this Scottish insight and to understand that classical

[9] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). For Israel, the French Revolution was made possible by the intellectual revolution which preceded it. This conclusion can be challenged; see especially Roger Chartier's innovative book on the *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

[10] On the impact of Scottish philosophy in France, see M. Malherbe, "The Impact on Europe," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 298-315. On America, see S. Fleischacker, "The Impact on America: Scottish Philosophy and the American Founding," in ibid., 316-7; and the excellent article by James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism, Christianity, Republicanism and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *The Journal of American History*, 74:1 (1987): 9-33.

republican virtues could be conciliated with modern values.[11] On the eve of the Revolution, however, these ideas were concentrated among an elite, although Turgot, Louis XVI's minister, attempted to implement some of them. Turgot's plan was doomed to failure, but Condorcet would later describe Turgot as France's first republican, by which he meant that Turgot had tried to implement a "civilized monarchy" with good laws based on natural rights. According to Condorcet in those pre-Revolutionary years, such a monarchy would have governed France better than any American-style republic could ever hope to. At this point, the French were primarily drawing on their own national traditions as they began to think of modern political reforms.

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Before further exploring the philosophical influence of the Scots on the French revolutionaries, let us return to the American War of Independence of 1776-1783, which had affected not only the ideas but also the lives and experiences of many French citizens who fought alongside the insurgents. The aristocrats Lafayette, Montmorency, Rochambeau, Lauzun, La Rochefoucauld, and other liberal nobles and citizens were involved in the creation of the new republic.[12] When they returned to Paris, they met Benjamin Franklin, Philip Mazzei, and, somewhat later, Thomas Jefferson, William Short, and Gouverneur Morris. From the beginning of the war, Franklin

[11] J.-P. Cotten, "La philosophie écossaise en France avant Victor Cousin," in *Victor Cousin, les idéologues et les Ecossais: colloque international de février 1982 au Centre international d'études pédagogiques de Sèvres* (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1985), 99-157.

[12] See G. Bodinier, *Les Officiers de l'armée royale, combattants de la guerre d'indépendance des Etats-Unis. De Yorktown à l'an II* (Vincennes: Service historique de l'armée de terre, 1983), 383-96. Thirteen "American" officers were elected to the Estates General and became "liberals": they included Custine, Lameth, Broglie, Noailles, Biron, Lafayette, and La Rochefoucauld. Only three of the Constitutant Assembly's "American" officers supported absolutist monarchy.

enjoyed great popularity as the paragon of modern virtue; for instance, liberal aristocrats commissioned a sculpted bust of him to add to their collection of great men. Franklin and his admirers discussed the American Revolution and its democratic ambitions; indeed, American state constitutions had been translated and were circulating through salons and the press six years before the French Revolution.[13] French ministers' attempts at reform in the 1770s and 1780s further encouraged these discussions.

North of France, in the United Provinces, another American patriot did all he could to stimulate an alliance between the Netherlands and his own country in order to obtain loans from the wealthy Dutch. Before gaining this financial support, however, John Adams had to be recognized as the official ambassador of the new republic; he was therefore at pains to publicize and praise the principles of the new government. In so doing, Adams updated the very notion of republicanism and of representative democracy based on the natural rights of man. He was helped by such Dutch journalists as Johan Luzac and Antoine-Marie Cerisier, who popularized these new ideas in their papers. When Great Britain declared war on the United Provinces at the end of 1780 and immediately seized the Dutch navy, the first Dutch national reaction was to call it treason and to blame the stadholder for the defeat. The second reaction was a patriotic pamphlet from the baron Johan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, translator of English-language writers including Andrew Fletcher, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley. Van der Capellen launched an appeal to form new alliances – for instance with France – and to reform the Union. Moreover, he argued for the establishment of national militias and the abolition of feudal rights. Between 1782 and 1787, as a result of Van der Capellen's campaign, the Dutch began to consider major governmental

[13] For the bust of Franklin, see my book *Les monuments de la Révolution: une histoire de représentation* (Paris: H. Champion, 1997), 49; and also William Howard Adams, *The Paris Years of Thomas Jefferson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 10-3.

reforms based on the natural rights of man. In most towns new regulations were written and new municipal councils elected, although Amsterdam dawdled until 1787. Citizen militias were formed across the country. Among the different municipal declarations of rights, those of Deventer and Zwolle were the most American, closely following the Massachusetts declaration. This resemblance is hardly surprising given that both towns are situated in the province of Overijssel, Van der Capellen's residence, and that Van der Capellen was an acquaintance of John Adams.[14] Yet in the 1780s, having read the recently translated American state constitutions and bills of rights, many Dutch truly believed that America was imitating their own sixteenth-century revolt against Spain and implementing a sort of Union of Utrecht. Only later did they discover the great novelty of the American enterprise.[15]

In 1787 when the Prussians invaded the republic to return the stadholder to power, most of the Dutch patriots stayed on the continent and sought refuge in Belgium and France. There, they met the Genevan patriots who had fled their country as early as 1782. The Genevan exile community included Etienne Dumont, De Bourges, Jacques-Antoine du Roveray and Etienne Clavière, who would become French minister of finance during the

[14] Wayne Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels: The Revolutionary World of an Eighteenth-Century Dutch City* (New York: Blackwell, 1989); and J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *Voorbeeld in de Verte. De invloed van de Amerikaanse Revolutie in Nederland* (Baarn: In den Toren, 1979).

[15] The American federal Constitution was translated into French in Jan. 1789. See Robert H. Blackman, "American Influences on the French Constitutional Debates of Summer 1789," in *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe* (2003, forthcoming). Van der Capellen's best friend, the pastor Van der Kemp, eventually emigrated to the United States after the breakdown of the Patriot revolution.

Revolution.[16] These Genevans became Mirabeau's collaborators, and their role in his writing has been well documented.[17]

Mirabeau's circle, however, also included Dutch patriots such as Paul-Henri Marron and, later, Cerisier, who undoubtedly contributed to Mirabeau's 1787 "Doutes sur la liberté de l'Escaut," which attacked the ambitions of the Austrian emperor on behalf of the United Provinces, and his 1788 "Aux Bataves sur le stadhouderat."[18] Both texts are well informed about the history and contemporary situation of the United Provinces.[19] "Aux Bataves" also contains a declaration of rights, which lends itself to comparison with its American predecessors. As he composed this declaration in the spring of 1788, Mirabeau was also preparing a plan for revolution for the United Provinces.[20] As he had spent little time in the Netherlands, however, he could not have been familiar with its topography or customs, and he owed a considerable debt to the expertise and the ideas of the exiled Dutch patriots, who were primarily interested in returning to their fatherland with the opportunity to implement reforms. Among these Dutch exiles were some native French speakers, including Cerisier, a journalist of French origin, and Pierre-Alexandre Dumont Pigalle, a Walloon resident of Holland. Also in 1788 Cerisier published a fragment of a declaration of the

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[16] Pierre-Henri Lebrun-Tondu, a Belgian refugee who was also part of this world of patriot exiles, became minister of foreign affairs. Note that most of the foreign exiles were friends of the Girondins, and two foreigners became ministers under their government.

[17] J. Bénétruy, *L'Atelier de Mirabeau. Quatre proscrits dans la tourmente révolutionnaire* (Geneva: A. Jullien, 1962); and Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[18] Joost Rosendaal, *Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2004). Dumont Pigalle noted that his fellow exiles Blok and Van Hoey were in contact with Mirabeau and the duke of Orléans: Nationaal Archief, The Hague [hereafter NA], archives Dumont Pigalle, 13.

[19] Jeremy Popkin, "Dutch Patriots, French Journalists and Declaration of Rights: the *leidse ontwerp* of 1785 and its Diffusion in France," *The Historical Journal* 38 (1995): 553-65.

[20] Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 244, 247 and n. 22.

rights of man in the *Analyse des Papiers Anglais*, another journal associated with Mirabeau's circle. Cerisier excerpted his declaration from a Dutch text of 1785 called the Leiden Draft. [21] At almost the same time, he was also preparing for an "action (*coup de main*) to reestablish the patriots in power" – Dumont Pigalle called it a "revolution."[22]

Before the fall of the Bastille, many revolutionary texts had thus reached the French public. The American documents were at that time the most influential, but the very fact that there were also Dutch bills of rights could only increase the belief that such declarations were essential to framing constitutional reforms. Certainly the creation of the American republic was an impetus toward thinking of alternatives to the old order. It was proof that a vast republic could exist – something philosophers of the Enlightenment had denied – and that the rights of man could in fact be proclaimed in a written constitution. In the 1780s, however, French reformers did not want to revolutionize their government. If we may believe Condorcet, the French monarchy was in 1786 still satisfactory. Nevertheless, French financial problems and the American and Dutch revolutions inspired the French to think of radical reforms and to justify popular sovereignty.[23] From September 1784, the Genevan Clavière and the young Jacques-Pierre Brissot were considering applying Clavière's republican and Scottish ideas to the French state,[24]

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[21] I do not share Popkin's view that Cerisier wrote the Leiden text in French. Its heavy style and its typical content indicate that it was a Dutch text, written by Dutch patriots (including Cerisier). Cerisier probably translated the text into French.

[22] NA, archives Dumont Pigalle, 13. According to Cerisier, the exiled patriots made not two but several plans. Dumont Pigalle was not sure about the participation of Lafayette and the chevalier Ternant, but the latter, who had fought alongside the Dutch patriots during the 1780s, was indeed involved.

[23] Significantly, the question of necessary reforms had already arisen in France during the Seven Years' War, which led to defeat and the loss of the French American colonies to Great Britain.

[24] Richard Whatmore, "Commerce, Constitutions, and the Manners of a Nation: Etienne Clavière's Revolutionary Political Economy," *History of European Ideas* 22:5/6 (1996): 351-68, here 354.

while the abbé Sieyès had begun writing his first constitutional drafts in the 1770s and 1780s.[25] As for Lafayette, since 1783 he had displayed a copy of the Declaration of Independence in the entry hall of his house next to an empty frame "waiting for the declaration of the Rights of France."[26]

Not all Dutch patriots spent the 1780s with Mirabeau. The banker Balthasar Abbema was a friend of Lafayette and thus of Jefferson; another Dutch patriot Jacobus van Staphorst was to become America's banker in Paris and a good friend of Philip Mazzei, while Madame de Champcenetz, a Dutch-born marquise, was suspected of intriguing with "all the refugees of the patriot party."[27] A small country, the republic of the United Provinces has not drawn historians' attention to its impact before and during the Revolution. Yet in the eighteenth century it was a famous and well-visited country. Many philosophers and future revolutionaries had made the journey to what they called "Holland" and were astonished by its government, its virtues, its prosperity, and its republican manners. Granted, some visitors lamented the decline of classical republicanism, the oligarchy of the regents, and the predominance of commercial values, but until the creation of the American republic, the Dutch republic remained a model for many.[28] As for commerce and the fear of corruption, Montesquieu himself interpreted the commerce of the United Provinces as being based in economic necessity, which

[25] Sieyès' papers contain drafts written during the 1770s and 1780s in which he tried to give more power to the provincial assemblies and attacked the monarchy. Archives nationales, Paris [hereafter AN] 284 AP 3.

[26] Adams, 96. This declaration would later inspire Lafayette's draft.

[27] O. Browning, *Dispatches from Paris, 1784-1790*, 2 vols. (London: The Society, 1909-10), 2:23; and NA, archive Dumont Pigalle, 123.

[28] In America, just before the War of Independence, several gazettes suggested imitating the United Provinces and forming an independent commonwealth. T. Draper, *A Struggle for Power. The American Revolution* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 409. On French representations of the Dutch Republic, see Van Strien-Chardonneau, 282-7.

was far better than the French commerce of luxury.[29] The former was excellent for the wealth of the country and for the manners of the people; the latter was bad, for it led to corruption and thence to general poverty. Many later French readers shared Montesquieu's perspective.

The Scottish philosophers shared many ideas with Dutch and French authors and reformers,[30] and English scholars have recently elaborated these links, demonstrating that French revolutionaries' philosophical interests ranged beyond an obsession with classical republicanism and civic virtue. Condorcet, Sieyès, Pierre-Louis Roederer, Clavière, and others also read David Hume, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson, and they proposed a modern form of republicanism that did not exclude commerce, individual liberty, or public wealth.[31] Sieyès' anti-feudalism, for instance, makes better sense if we understand that he saw feudal society as economically unproductive. Sieyès believed that a modern society needed to stimulate labor and activity in order to produce national wealth and happiness.[32] Roederer shared many of Sieyès' ideas; he, too, believed that merchants and consumers had the same interests and that merchants had to be honest if they wanted to trade. A

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[29] See Charles-Louis de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe* (1734; Geneva: Droz, 2000) for his views on peace and commerce in modern societies.

[30] In 1780 the Dutch patriot Van der Capellen translated not only Price and Priestley but also Fletcher, who accepted commerce and money interests but asked for the maintenance of civic virtue. See M. Evers, "Angelsaksische inspiratiebronnen voor de patriottische denkbeelden van J. D. van der Capellen," in *1787. De Nederlandse revolutie?*, ed. Th. S. M. van der Zee, J. G. M. M. Rosendaal, and P. G. B. Thissen (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1988), 206-45.

[31] James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[32] On Sieyès, see Sonenscher, 67-74; and Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution*, 75. For Sieyès, the crucial issue was the distinction between civil and public, not between civil and civic. He also understood that citizens in a modern society do not have to be soldiers. AN 284 AP 3.

commercial society was thus not necessarily corrupt, and the United Provinces provided Roederer with evidence that commerce might encourage good manners. As for the Dutch, they were convinced that commerce brought activity and wealth just as the Scots, some of whom had studied in the Netherlands, believed that it was not incompatible with republican virtues.[33] The Genevan Clavière was another advocate of a modern society based on exchange and good manners. For him, classical virtue had lost its pre-eminence to civil virtue as the basis of civilization.

During the Revolution, these individuals remained true to their convictions of the 1780s even if they could not express themselves during the Terror. After the fall of Robespierre, however, the debate among French revolutionaries no longer centered on the opposition between civic tradition and civil innovation but increasingly concerned legislators' role in forming and educating the people. As a reaction to the Terror, which had given an important role to coercive laws in order to regenerate the people, the views of the 1780s resurfaced after Thermidor. Legislators and thinkers emphasized the role of habit and custom and their importance for the acceptance or rejection of new institutions. More than ever before, education was on the agenda at the expense of participation, an idea that developed from the Scottish Enlightenment.[34] Obviously, Frenchmen of the 1790s found it possible to adapt Scottish ideas to the revolutionary situation and accommodate them to French republicanism and national character.[35]

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[33] Kenneth Margerison, *P. L. Roederer: Political Thought and Practice during the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983); Pierre-Louis Roederer, *The Spirit of the Revolution of 1789: P. L. Roederer*, trans., ed., and intro. Murray Forsyth (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1989); and Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution*, 76.

[34] For more extensive treatment, see Kloppenberg or D. T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History* 79:1 (1992): 11-38.

[35] Compare Italy, where many authors referred to Hume, Smith, and Ferguson and incorporated French thinkers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, or the Genevan Rousseau without forgetting their own philosophical tradition:

Like the circulation of texts, travel to countries experimenting with revolution brought foreign revolutionary ideas back to France. Brissot, who became the leader of the Girondins, is a perfect illustration of the engaged writer of the pre-revolutionary era. More than Mirabeau, with whom he had sometimes worked, Brissot was a great traveler who visited most of the countries where disturbances had already broken out. In 1782, he was in Switzerland where he met the patriot Clavière before being constrained to flee Geneva. In 1782-1784 he was in England, working as a journalist at the *Courrier de l'Europe* and thinking of establishing a Lycée de Londres; in 1787, he was in the Netherlands where the patriots had seized power. From 1784 to 1787, he published several texts on the United States whose revolution he admired and championed against the marquis de Chastellux, who was more skeptical. In 1788, Brissot even set off on a journey to America where he was to meet some of the Founding Fathers: John Adams, Samuel Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington. The year before, in August 1787, he was intriguing with the marquis du Crest and the duke of Orléans and preparing a plan for reform – although not for revolution, as Claude Perroud assumed.[36]

This plan for reform reveals what Brissot had learned from his travels in foreign countries, his contacts with foreign patriots, and his wide reading. He often refers knowledgeably to England and its parliament, and he is aware of the unsteady situation of most countries on the continent. He thinks that all nations will shortly achieve Liberty, and he wants to enforce a constitution so that the people would be free to consent to taxation. Here he echos the American credo: "No taxation without representation"

Franco Venturi, "Scottish Echoes in Eighteenth-Century Italy," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 345-62.

[36] See Claude Perroud's introduction to Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, *Mémoires (1754-1793),* vol. 3, *Correspondance et papiers*, ed. Claude Perroud (Paris: A. Picard et fils, 1912).

– that is, without the consent of the people.[37] He envisages the creation of an opposition party, as in England, that will protect the rights of the people. When Brissot composed this plan in 1787, he approved of an opposition as long as it acted for the public good, and he assigned this function to the parlements and the provincial estates, which he believed ought to defend the people's right to approve taxes against the government and the ministers. To reach this goal, Brissot advised sparing no expense in appealing to public opinion via journals and pamphlets; the press, he believed, had convinced the English that Parliament was the people's friend. This short text of August 1787 demonstrates how key concepts of the Enlightenment were transformed during the years before the French Revolution. Thomas Jefferson was aware of these changes and even spoke of "the revolution in public opinion" he discovered in Paris.[38] As for Brissot, he clearly learned his lessons in Switzerland, England, and Holland as well in American documents.[39] His experiences and contacts from these journeys provided him with general convictions about the increasing unrest in Europe, public opinion, the rights of man, and the necessity of representation, but also with precise ideas and strategies about the indispensable consent of the people and, last but not least, about the correct way to influence opinion.

Obviously, Brissot was deeply involved in political and philosophical discussions from the mid-eighteenth century to the French Revolution, and he was not an exception – think of Mirabeau, Lafayette, Condorcet, Clavière, or Marat, even if they

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[37] J. Félix, *Louis XVI et Marie-Antoinette. Un couple en politique* (Paris: Payot, 2006). To be fair, the French parlements shared this language, but when their members referred to the people or the nation, they meant themselves.

[38] *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 11:469-91.

[39] On Brissot and against the interpretation of Robert Darnton, see F. A. de Luna, "The Dean Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, jeune philosophe," *French Historical Studies* 17:1 (1991): 159-90. On ideas and practices, see J. G. A. Pocock, "The Reconstruction of Discourse: Towards the Historiography of Political Thought," *Modern Language Notes* 96:5 (1981): 959-80.

were not as active as the young Brissot. Moreover, these adventurous men already had radical ideas before the Parisians took the Bastille. They formed such ideas not because they were frustrated, as Robert Darnton would have it, but because their contacts and experiences had taught them a new language and new practices which enabled them to think about new realities and principles and to imagine radical change in France.[40] Had not America and Holland already experimented with such new principles? However, these men were not necessarily interested in faithfully imitating America or Holland; rather, these new topics allowed them to compare and to criticize. As Marcel Gauchet has noted, a precedent is not an impulse to imitation but more often to emulation.[41]

Obviously, the international circulation of radical ideas did not directly cause the French Revolution, but it did make the very idea of revolution thinkable. Foreign declarations of rights, for instance, encouraged the French from the 1780s to think about civil society, the state of nature, and the improvement of general wealth and national morality. The intrigues of exiled patriots encouraged revolutionary thinking within France, as did the plan for revolution that Mirabeau and his foreign colleagues concocted in the spring of 1788. Similar intrigues were carried on in 1792 when the Girondins decided to wage war on Austria and Prussia, a decision encouraged by Dutch refugees who tried regularly to export the French Revolution into their country and to extend the war to the northern frontiers. The Genevans[42] and

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[40] Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). In Aug. 1787, Jefferson wrote that young and middle-aged French defended the rights of the nation – "in opposition to the old only." *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail & John Adams*, ed. L. J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 1:196.

[41] Marcel Gauchet, "La déclaration des droits de l'homme," in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 121-38.

[42] In April 1792, when he was minister of finance, Clavière wanted France to annex Geneva in order to improve French finances. He believed also that the

Belgians[43] were also on the scene pursuing their own agendas. As Livesey explains, "the French variant of republicanism derived from a conjunction of Genevan political practice, French political theory and Anglo-American experience."[44] I would add that the Dutch patriot experiences and practices were equally important if not more so, because the Dutch had just experienced a "long" revolution (1781-1787) during which they implemented new democratic regulations, fought in militias against the stadholder's troops, and finally invented a political sociability and a political culture that may have inspired French patriots from 1787-1788. All this international activity must not lead us to conclude that there was an organized conspiracy against the French monarchy; there is no need to update the conspiracy theories of Barruel or Cochin. However, the international dimension of patriotism and republicanism and the intensive exchanges of the revolutionary period all stimulated the French first to think of reforms, to welcome their own revolution without too much surprise, and, above all, to take advantage of the situation.[45]

The French situation of the 1790s was also a moment when the political theories of the Scots seemed especially relevant and potentially realizable. Under the pressure of revolutionary events, Scottish-style political economy became an issue, although it was thoroughly "frenchified." Engagement with ideas about political economy led revolutionaries to believe that

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Genevans would have a good influence on French manners: Whatmore, "Commerce, Constitutions and the Manners of a Nation," 364.

[43] The Belgians were the first to ask the French government if they might form a "Belgian Legion." NA, archive Dumont Pigalle, 14. The Dutch followed and on 1 Aug. 1792, the National Assembly created a "Légion franche étrangère," which would be suppressed as early as Feb. 1793.

[44] Livesey, 30.

[45] Once again, Sieyès' papers show how modern some thinkers already were in the 1770s and 80s. For instance, Sieyès rejected the notion of the king as father because where a father nurtures, protects, and helps his children, a king is nurtured, protected, and helped by the nation. AN 284 AP 3. As for Lafayette and Jefferson, they were drafting a bill of rights and thinking of a new constitution for France: Adams, 265.

modern republicanism was possible in France[46] as long as national manners changed to suit the newborn model of virtue. Long before Benjamin Constant, men such as Sieyès and Roederer were aware of the importance of habit and custom and decided to modify them gradually by introducing festivals, rituals, education, and all kinds of cultural institutions.[47] In their ideas about modern society, however, they stayed closer to men such as the republicans Fletcher and Ferguson than to the far more "liberal" Smith and Hume.[48]

Wars were also key to the circulation of patriotic and revolutionary ideas in the pre-revolutionary period. As David Bell and Jay Smith have demonstrated, wars provoked the emergence of a new form of patriotism and many comments or complaints about the fatherland's situation.[49] On one hand, wars gave rise to a hatred of the enemy – English distaste for the French, for instance.[50] On the other and more importantly, they

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[46] I prefer the term "modern republicanism" or "liberal republicanism" to Livesey's "commercial republicanism," because this republicanism was not concerned only with commerce. On "liberal republicanism," see Kloppenberg, 33.

[47] Unfortunately Whatmore does not discuss Ferguson's influence in France and the rest of Europe. Nor is he aware of the other foreign influences, i.e. Dutch. Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution*, 96-7.

[48] As a scholar of Fletcher, Ferguson did not argue only in favor of commerce and wealth, and, like Fletcher, he thought it was best "to be rich without being corrupt." Like a modern republican, he wanted civic virtue to protect civil values, a view that many legislators from the Directory were to share.

[49] David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Jay M. Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[50] Although historians have been too quick to assume the durability of such enmity. French hatred of the English existed alongside a sympathy that was sensible before, during, and after the Revolution. Patriotism and chauvinism, as Peter Campbell says, do not follow a "linear evolution." Peter R. Campbell, "The Language of Patriotism in France, 1750-1770," *e-journal* 1 (2007): 1-43. There were no "absolute enemies" at that time, just "occasional" or "relational" adversaries. For a new definition of the problem, see Chantal

prompted people to consider reforms for their own governments. Defeat was indeed an important impulse for seeking the causes of national decline and working out plans for recovery. Surprisingly, different countries responded to war by adopting the same reform programs: in France, Scotland, America, and the Netherlands we see calls for universal education and the participation of virtuous citizens to prevent further national corruption and degeneration. Following the Jacobin republic and the Terror, which discredited more than ever the classical conception of republicanism, the French Revolution replaced direct political participation by national education and civil values but remained republican in the modern sense.[51]

Finally, one must not forget that pre-revolutionary travels to the Netherlands, Italy, or Switzerland had given French thinkers and dilettantes the opportunity to discover foreign realities, compare them with those of their own country, and think about importing or adapting some of them to France. More than books and treaties, real-life experiences refined understanding and stimulated reform or at least thinking about reform. Travel was a source of emulation – not a direct cause of the Revolution, but an experience that smoothed the way for the French to think in new ways about their own country. As such, travel experiences might have sped up the revolutionary process.[52] The same can be said

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Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research* 66:32 (1999): 745-57.

[51] My comparative research on the Batavian, French, and American Revolutions leads me to this interpretation. Still, it is difficult to speak here of a real democracy, as does Livesey. I would argue that the Directory was republican – either "modern" or "liberal" – and not democratic in the modern sense. Howard Brown would describe this political regime as "liberal authoritarianism": *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

[52] The Americans and Dutch did not achieve their reforms at the same pace as the French. For America and the indecision of the framers, see J. R. Pole, *The Decision for American Independence* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975). By contrast, think of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man of Aug. 1789, composed only a few weeks after the fall of the Bastille. In the

of the discussions and exchanges within international patriot networks. Because of their participation in radical cosmopolitan intellectual circles, Mirabeau, Condorcet, Clavière, and Lafayette had a draft of a bill of rights ready several months before the meeting of the Estates General.[53] These foreign dreams and projects had to be "nationalized," however. The eighteenth-century conviction that "national character" was a significant factor in statecraft rendered impossible any slavish imitation of a foreign model.[54] Nevertheless, French political debate in the 1780s would not have been the same without these impulses, which stimulated the French elite to criticize their own government, conceive of new principles, and emulate foreign precursors. Foreign wars encouraged consideration of national reforms and reinforced the sentiment of being French – or American, or Dutch, or British. Last but not least, they made state building, which became one of the great issues of the eighteenth-century revolutions, far easier.

Let me conclude with a brief discussion of the nature of cultural and political transfers and a critique of traditional interpretations of these patterns of interaction. Political ideas did not always originate in France to be dispersed Europe-wide, as Godechot and many French historians have claimed. Moreover, not every French innovation was accepted by its revolutionary neighbors. Finally, the dissemination and adoption of new

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United Provinces, the patriots of the 1780s required several years before they could proclaim a bill of rights, but in 1795 they had one ready in less than a week.

[53] For the early bills of rights, see Stéphane Rials, ed., *La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Paris: Hachette, 1988). Mirabeau wrote the first declaration in France (spring 1788), and it appears in his "Adresse aux Bataves sur le Stadhouderat." Lafayette was already considering reforms in late 1788 – alongside Thomas Jefferson, who had been arguing on behalf of a written constitution for France since 1785.

[54] See my *La Révolution batave entre la France et l'Amérique* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008). Arguments about and descriptions of national characters can be found in Dutch texts by the pastors Engelberts, Ockerse, or Van Hamelsveld; in America, see Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster, but also *The Federalist*.

political principles was not linear; the Terror, for instance, discredited the enthusiasms of the 1780s, but pre-revolutionary debates remerged after the fall of Robespierre, taking on a new (modern) republican cast. The dynamic of interaction was neither fixed nor simple; the circulation of ideas necessarily led to personal reinterpretations and national relocations. For instance, when French reformers began to consider natural rights and a written constitution, they knew that these rights and laws would be enforced in a nation used to absolute monarchy and that they therefore had to take a different form than in a virtuous or a commercial republic. Nor were all foreign models fully implemented; where some of their features were accepted, others were rejected. National traditions shaped the adoption of new ideas, with reformers drawing from their own sources as well as foreign ones. Finally, foreign influences became so intertwined in this period that it is difficult to know where an idea, a practice, or a law originated – and thus impossible to identify its true origin. As Franco Venturi has demonstrated, the philosophers and, after them, the revolutionaries drew on various sources and worked out hybrid texts and ideas. These concepts might rest on Prussian, Swiss, Scottish, British, or Italian models, not only on American or Dutch ones.[55] There are also disguised or phantom diffusions: instances of what look like cultural or political transfers but are not. The United Provinces offer one such case of phantom diffusion: bills of rights stressing the natural equality of man had already been proclaimed from 1785 on, so Dutch ideas of equality did not derive from the influence of the Jacobin republic.[56] Because of these approvals, rejections,

[55] Cf. Jourdan, *La Révolution batave*, chs. 5 and 6. Prussia was an important influence for education and codification; Switzerland for education and national festivals or monuments, and Italy played a significant role in modernizing criminal law.

[56] Natural equality appears exclusively Jacobin to French historians who are unaware of these early Dutch texts. In fact, there are references to natural equality as the first principle upon which the others are founded in Locke's *Treatise on Civil Government* and in the American bills of rights. Long before the Jacobins, protestants argued that God had created all men equal and that other rights derived from this natural equality.

reinterpretations, dislocations, and disguised or phantom diffusions, historians must be careful before assigning either foreign causes *or* origins to the French Revolution – the paradox at the center of this essay.[57] We should rather describe the western revolutions as being in dialogue with each other and exchanging ideas, programs, experiences, and practices. These revolutionary movements had in fact "the same capacity for creation and invention" – all the more since they found themselves in (almost) the same situation but within different structures and contexts.[58] Thus foreign influences were important models for emulation but never decisive. In this sense, we might paraphrase Derrida and say that foreign influences during the age of revolution look like supplements rather than like an origin.

[57] On diffusionism (what I call here cultural and political transfers) and its terminology, see S. Chabot and J.-W. Duyvendak, "Globalization and Transnational Diffusion between Social Movements: Reconceptualizing the Dissemination of the Gandhian Repertoire and the 'coming out' Routine," *Theory and Society* 31:6 (2002): 706.

[58] Blaut, 36.